

# Appropriations Committee Public Hearing-Human Services

February 11, 2010

## Testimony Presented by United Way of Connecticut Concerning HUSKY Infoline

My name is Richard Porth and I serve as the CEO of United Way of Connecticut. Tanya Barrett, UWC's Vice President for 2-1-1 Health and Human Services, is joining me in presenting this testimony. Thank you for the opportunity to tell the HUSKY Infoline story.

### Why Connecticut Needs HUSKY Infoline

**Restoring HUSKY Infoline funding is right for Connecticut because:**

- ➡ **HUSKY Infoline (HIL)** is a specialized unit of the United Way of Connecticut/2-1-1 Infoline system that has served over **1.2 million** Connecticut residents since its inception in 1998. Connecticut residents who dial 877-CT-HUSKY or 2-1-1 reach knowledgeable, multilingual, telephone care coordinators ready to advocate for HUSKY clients to get the healthcare they need and answer questions to help navigate the HUSKY program.
- ➡ **At a cost of less than \$680,000** per year, HIL provides a place for Connecticut families to turn when they have questions about program eligibility, need application assistance, have been disenrolled from coverage, or need help accessing needed healthcare services.
- ➡ Recent research estimates that the cost associated with each child who disenrolls from Medicaid or SCHIP is \$2,121 per year due to emergency room use for non-urgent conditions. In FY 2009, HIL assisted 525 children get re-enrolled in HUSKY after losing coverage, **potentially saving the state over \$1.1 million.**
- ➡ HIL, with its focus on getting children connected with Early, Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment (EPSDT) services, is cost effective from the standpoint that more children access preventive care, which may result in better health outcomes and less emergency room visits, which average \$1,038 each according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- ➡ The Department of Social Services has relied on HIL to assist with the implementation of frequent changes to the program such as the managed care transition, pharmacy and dental carve-outs, and the federal citizenship regulations. Given the current budget crisis and proposed HUSKY cuts, **the need is greater than ever** for assistance to be available for families who need help navigating the ever-fluctuating program.
- ➡ Data collection by HIL staff result in regular reports to DSS regarding barriers experienced by callers in enrolling and/or accessing services. This information serves as an **early warning system** for program administrators and legislators.
- ➡ Last year, HIL received **60,699** incoming calls and made over **44,740** outbound calls on behalf of those Connecticut families. HIL is committed to ensuring that every eligible family receives the healthcare they deserve.

- ➡ What's at Stake? The elimination of HUSKY Infoline will result in:
  - Increased burden on already stretched DSS regional staff
  - Longer interruption of medical benefits for eligible families
  - Decrease in families' ability to obtain health care services for their children, potentially resulting in less access to preventive care and more Emergency Room use
  
- ➡ Five common requests for help from HUSKY Infoline:
  - I need help with my medical bill.
  - I need assistance finding a dentist.
  - How do I get expedited coverage for a child or a pregnant woman?
  - I cannot get my child's prescription filled at the pharmacy.
  - How do I find a doctor that accepts my insurance?

We respectfully request that the legislature restore \$670,000 in the state's FY10-11 budget to support HUSKY Infoline's vital services to people across the state. Thank you.